

Statement of Representative James A. Leach
Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Hearing entitled "Focus on a Changing Japan"
April 20, 2005

On behalf of the Subcommittee, I would like to welcome our distinguished witnesses to our hearing this morning. We appreciate your willingness to accommodate an earlier start to our proceedings today.

The purpose of our discussion this morning is to focus on developments in Japan and their impact on the United States and the broader Asia Pacific region. At first blush, this might seem an unusual subject for Congressional interest at this time. After all, U.S.-Japan relations, widely understood here and across the Pacific to be critical to advancing peace and stability in Asia and the Pacific, are at "best ever" levels.

The partnership between our two great countries - based on a remarkable coincidence of interests economically, strategically, and in terms of shared democratic philosophy - continues to deepen and mature even as Japan itself adapts to the uncertainty of the post-Cold War world.

On the home front, Prime Minister Koizumi has promoted a series of structural reforms designed to reverse the economic stagnation and political gridlock that hallmarked much of the "lost decade" of the 1990s. Although change in Japan's mercantilist orientation has been gradual, it is nonetheless striking how Tokyo has become far more welcoming of foreign direct investment, non-Japanese corporate management, and greater competition within its home markets.

Japan's transformation has been even more striking in national security affairs. Over the last decade Japan has slowly but steadily begun to transform both its institutions of governance and outlook on world affairs in ways that permit more cooperation with the United States, as well as a greater degree of activism in international security affairs. At the same time, Japan is becoming ever more important to advancing a panoply of foreign policy interests largely consistent with American objectives: from supporting counter-terrorism operations in the Indian ocean, to contributing humanitarian assistance in Iraq, to preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to working with the U.S. and others in seeking a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear challenge.

For many years Japan has also been deeply engaged with the U.S. and other industrialized democracies as a leader at the United Nations and other multilateral institutions. Indeed, the first article of the 1960 U.S.-Japanese security treaty includes the stipulation that both partners "will endeavor... to strengthen the United Nations so that its mission of maintaining international peace and security may be discharged more effectively."

In this regard, it is in the world's interest and the U.S. national interest to expand the United Nations Security Council. From a Congressional perspective, I find the claim of Japan -- the world's second largest economy, the largest creditor country, and a leading donor of foreign assistance -- to be compelling. Japan's candidacy deserves America's unswerving support.

Having said all that, it should be understood that there are powerful secular trends driving policymakers in Japan and elsewhere in the region which demand America's closest attention. For a variety of reasons, it would appear that power politics is on the rise in Northeast Asia, with its attendant potential to create uncertainty and foster regional instability. Attentive American concern, continued engagement, and steady leadership is vital if peace and prosperity is to be preserved in this historic cockpit of geopolitical conflict.

In many cases, the causes of recent friction have little to do with the United States. They are more related to the past than to the present. Indeed, it is profound how history can be more controversial than current events. For example, while the Second World War and the expansionism that preceded it in Asia is a past-tense phenomenon for short-memoried Americans, the first half of the 20th century lives far more vibrantly in the hearts and souls of millions of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. A surprising level of antagonism has sprung up between South Korea and Japan over historical issues, including competing territorial claims for a chain of islets that lie between the two countries. Likewise, Sino-Japanese relations have deteriorated, with the Chinese people reflecting anger at the possibility Japan could become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the Japanese people becoming increasingly angry at Chinese attitudes both toward the past and competitive approaches to the future.

Here it is impressive to reflect upon the fact that at every turn in the last century the world has underestimated the power of nationalism. Events of the last several weeks remind us how impressive, for good or ill, is that power, the desire of people to carve their own destiny, to make their own mistakes.

In this context, we have assembled a distinguished panel to address these and other issues. I look forward to your testimony.
